

QUEEN BEES

and ladies who
write in the night

Isn't there something about the way Hanna Glawari has men buzzing around her that reminds one of a queen bee in her hive? It's not just that she is an extremely attractive young woman. Nor is it solely related to her sudden re-availability now that she has become a widow. Could it possibly have something to do with the twenty million francs left to her by the late Monsieur Glawari when he so gallantly took his leave after only six months of marriage? All will be revealed at the Gaiety in November.

In the meantime, ponder upon another kind of attraction: the fateful, sometimes fatal, attraction of young ladies who get up in the middle of the night to write love letters to gentlemen they have met for the first time that same day. The composer of *Eugene Onegin* was sufficiently attracted by one of them, the heroine in Pushkin's poem-novel, to start his work on setting it to music with a ravishing setting of just such a nocturnal scribbling bout.

Two fascinating heroines, then, whose areas of operation may be separated by the width of a continent, but who inspired the men who created their musical personae to produce operatic masterpieces. Because it is universally acknowledged that Franz Lehár's *The Merry Widow* and Pyotr Tchaikovsky's *Eugene Onegin* represent the supreme achievements of their respective composers' operatic outputs.



The Widow from Wales: Opera Ireland's Merry Widow was actually born in England. But Alwyn Mellor's major successes to date have been with Welsh National Opera where her impressive repertoire includes Ginevra in Handel's *Ariodante*, Mozart's Elvira and Fiordiligi, Tatyana in *Eugene Onegin*, Liu in *Turandot*, Micaela in *Carmen*, Ann Trulove in *The Rake's Progress* and Elsie Maynard in *The Yeomen of the Guard*, a role she has also recorded for Telarc. She has also sung Elvira for Glyndebourne Touring Opera and Fiordiligi in Santa Fé.

OPERA IRELAND presents

THE MERRY WIDOW (Lehár)

With: Alwyn Mellor, Susanne Elmark, Peter Grönlund Anthony Norton, Niall Morris, Patrick Raftery, Gerard O'Connor;

Conductor: Philippe Jordan.

Producer: Alan Stanford.

Designer: Bruno Schwengl

November 27 and 29;

December 1, 3, 5 and 7, 7.30 pm.

EUGENE ONEGIN (Tchaikovsky)

Tatyana Poluektova, Mary Ann McCormick, Sheila Nadler, Yvonne Lea, Ivan Choupenitch, Ugo Benelli, John Hancock, Michael Druett.

Conductor: Vadim Munster.

Producer: James Robinson.

Designer: Bruno Schwengl.

Nov 30; Dec 2, 4 and 6, 1997 at 7:30 pm.

Gaiety Theatre, Dublin

Booking (01) 677 1717

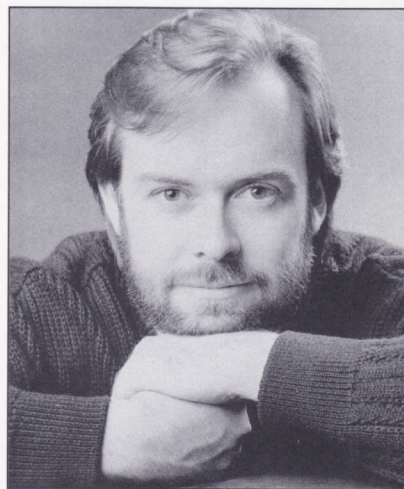
BUZZING IN WALTZ TIME

Whatever about the analogy with queen bees and their buzzing admirers, there is nothing remotely drone-like about Franz Lehár's best-known operetta. On the contrary, everything about *The Merry Widow* smacks of quality: the clever, funny plot; the opulent turn-of-the-century Parisian setting; the costumes; the exuberant dances and, most of all, the music. Regarded as the supreme operetta of the 20th century, its premiere in December 1905 ushered in the era that became known as the 'Silver Age' of Viennese operetta, a period which lasted up to the end of the 1920s and was dominated by the stage works of the Hungarian-born Lehár. This was the era when operetta plots acquired new overtones of sensuality, while their scores developed a degree of vibrancy unknown in earlier times. And these qualities are ever present in the best of Lehár's work during the period.

Mind you, *The Merry Widow* didn't get going without its share birth pangs – as well as a few ironies. The libretto, which Victor Leon and Leo Stein had fashioned from Henri Meilhac's comedy *L'attaché d'ambassade*, was originally intended for Richard Heuberger, composer of *Der Opernball* (1898). When the

writers found his efforts unacceptable they offered the book to the thirty-four year old Hungarian Franz Lehár, whose appointment as conductor at one of Vienna's theatres Heuberger had opposed on the grounds that he wasn't a competent conductor of waltzes! Lehár, who had set Leon's *Der Rastlbinder* three years earlier, started work immediately and, later in the same day, came up with the first completed number – the "Jogging in a one-horse gig" duet sung by Hanna and Danilo in Act II.

Unfortunately, the management of the Theater an der Wien was not impressed by the completed score and wanted to cancel the whole deal. But the singers, led by Mizzi Günther (Hanna) and Louis Treumann (Danilo), had faith in their composer and lobbied on his behalf, even agreeing to rehearse free of charge. And no greater love has any professional singer than that! So management reluctantly agreed to mount the work, albeit with second-hand costumes and hand-me-down sets. Although not exactly an overnight success, the work gradually caught on, especially after being transferred to the Neue Wiener Stadttheater, where it ran for six-hundred performances. It also began to travel abroad, with



American tenor **Patrick Raftery** who sings the role of Count Danilo in *The Merry Widow*.

notable successes in London (775 performances) and Buenos Aires, where it is said to have played simultaneously in five different theatres. The famous lady has worn her years well and is as popular today as she ever was. Except, perhaps, in the Balkans, where they have always been touchy about what they consider the operetta's lampooning of a typical Southern Slav embassy in Paris. Which, in view of recent happenings in that sorry part of Europe, gives the work an unexpected topicality.

ROSE

The sudden death of Rose O'Rourke, wife of Opera Ireland's chairman, Frank, came as a severe shock to everyone connected with music in Dublin. In addition to her involvement with a number of charitable causes, Rose was a tireless worker on behalf of opera in Dublin. The following appreciation comes from the members of Opera Ireland's Ladies' Committee:

It was with the greatest sadness that the Ladies' Committee learned of the sudden death of our beloved member Rose O'Rourke. Rose was a most popular member – a friend to all, gentle, sympathetic, a good listener, the hardest of workers and someone who, at all times, found goodness in others. Her enthusiasm and spirit carried us forward when, at times, we were lagging.

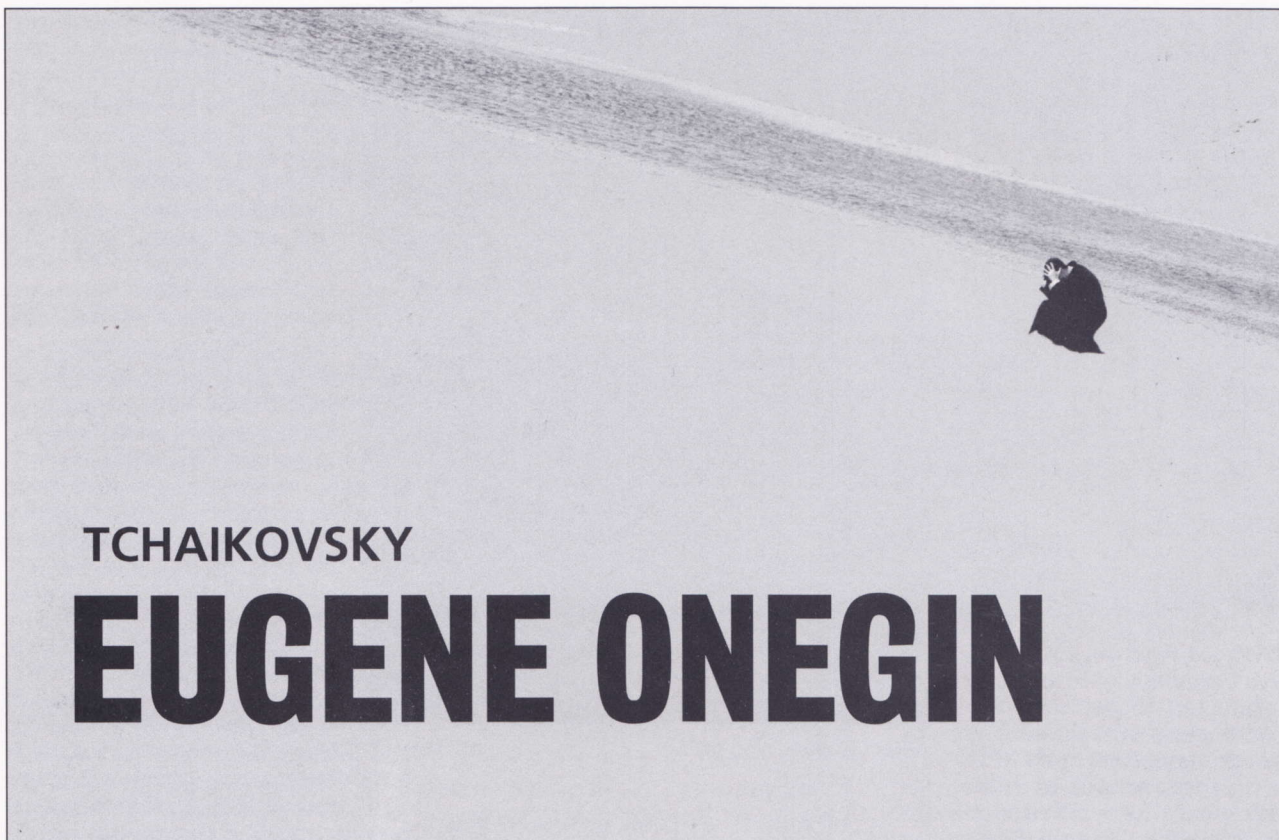
We would like to express our sincere sympathy and love to Frank and his family.

TITLED SPONSOR ANNOUNCED

Opera Ireland recently announced a major sponsorship with The Towers Hotel at Jurys, Ballsbridge, Dublin. "We are delighted that The Towers Hotel has joined us as titled sponsor for the Winter season, said David Collopy, General Manager. Pictured above are Niall Geoghan, Director of Marketing and Sales, Jurys plc (left) with David Collopy after signing the sponsorship agreement.



TATYANA'S FATEFUL MISSIVE



TCHAIKOVSKY EUGENE ONEGIN

Letters abound in opera. They are sent, received, intercepted, forged, destroyed. They cause joy, grief, merriment, fury, despair. But the most fateful operatic missive of all, one that destroys the lives of four people, is surely the letter penned by the love-struck Tatyana in Tchaikovsky's *Eugene Onegin*. The scene in which this letter is written is the emotional and musical pivot of the whole opera, or 'lyric scenes from Pushkin', as the composer preferred to call the work. Indeed, this 'letter scene', as it is usually called, was the first part of the work to be set by Tchaikovsky. His attention had been drawn to Pushkin's poem-novel by a female colleague at the Moscow Conservatoire and he had sent a copy of the book to the librettist Shilovsky. But, so taken was he by this letter-writing episode that he began composing music for it immediately, using Pushkin's original words as his text.

The scene in question takes place in Tatyana's bedroom. She is restless and unable to sleep as she recalls the moment when, that afternoon, she came face to face with her dream-man. His name is Eugene Onegin; he is a new neighbour and the impres-

sionable girl has fallen head-over-heels in love with him. Now, while the rest of the household sleeps, she spends the night composing a letter in which she pours out her love, holding nothing back.

Given the social mores of the society to which she belongs, it is an astonishing act of impulsiveness on the part of a well-brought-up young woman. And its consequences are dire: Onegin's rebuff and Tatyana's mortification are bad enough, but when Onegin goads his poet friend Lensky by openly flirting with Olga, Tatyana's sister and Lensky's sweetheart, the incident results in a duel in which the poet dies. Some years later, an older and less cynical Onegin meets Tatyana again. He realises that he now returns the love he disdained all those years ago. But it is too late. Tatyana is married to the elderly Prince Gremin and, although she confesses that she still loves Onegin, she is not prepared to betray her husband.

Tchaikovsky fashioned much of the libretto himself, using the original text whenever musical considerations allowed and writing new verses elsewhere, something which didn't endear him to literary

purists. But so adroitly does the score match the nuances of Pushkin's poetry that the spirit of the original is never betrayed. And what a glorious score it is. Aside from his setting of the letter scene, a famous showpiece beloved of sopranos, Tchaikovsky mines the inner feelings of the other characters adroitly. Onegin's worldly cynicism, Lensky's heartbreak, Prince Gremin's love for his young wife, all are clearly defined in their characters' individual music as well as in their contributions to the several masterful ensembles.

A YEAR OF LOSSES

It has been a year of losses for Opera Ireland. Following the deaths of long-serving Vice-president J F MacInerney and former conductor Col. Jim Doyle, we were further grieved by the loss of Albert Rosen, who died in Dublin in May, and by the sudden death in July of Rose O'Rourke, wife of our chairman, Frank. Tributes to Albert and Rose appear elsewhere in this issue of *Opera Ireland News*.

CHIEF ARCHITECT OF SUCCESS

Paddy Brennan recalls Albert Rosen's 21 years of operatic work in Dublin

Albert Rosen's death in Dublin on 23 May, at the age of 73, marked the end of a wonderful era in the musical life of our capital city. For those of us who were privileged to have worked with him during the 23 years he worked with our company his loss is all the more heartfelt.

Born in Vienna on 14 February 1924, Albert studied music there with Hans Swarowsky. He moved to Prague in 1960 as resident conductor at the National Theatre, later becoming director of the Smetana Theatre, now the State Opera. He first came to Ireland to conduct Massenet's *Don Quichotte* at the 1965 Wexford Festival, returning there regularly until 1994. He conducted 76 performances of 18 operas at Wexford and he also appeared in the USA and Canada as well as in the UK, where he worked with ENO, WNO and Scottish Opera.

Dublin audiences first encountered Albert Rosen when he conducted *Die Fledermaus* at the Gaiety in Winter 1969. And they continued to enjoy his skills for the next 21 years, in memorable performances of an incredible range of operas that covered works by Gluck, Mozart, Beethoven, Rossini, Donizetti, Verdi, Mascagni, Leoncavallo, Puccini, Bizet, Massenet, Strauss, Tchaikovsky, Smetana and Janáček. In all, he conducted 165 performances (25 of them in Cork) of 37 DGOS productions of 23 operas in six languages, as well as a number of gala concerts for the company in the Gaiety and the NCH.

As a chorister in virtually all of these performances, I have vivid memories



Albert Rosen, who died in Dublin on 23 May this year.

of Albert's dynamic approach and his remarkable capacity to wring the best out of performers. Instances that spring to mind include Pedro Lavirgen as José in a 1970 *Carmen*, Japanese soprano Atzuko Azuma in *Madama Butterfly* with Giuseppe Giacomini in 1971, and a *Tosca* in Cork with Lorenza Canepa, Ernesto Veronelli and Attilio d'Orazi, the second act of which ranks with the best I've seen anywhere in the world.

The Winter 1971 production of Smetana's *The Bartered Bride*, sung in Czech with principals, producer and costumes from Prague, was master-minded by Albert, who was the inspiration and driving force behind the whole project. Gabriella Benackova, then at the outset of her career, stole the show with her bright, effortless soprano and the

whole project, including the chorus's hard-learned Czech, was a triumph; and one that confounded many sceptics who had predicted that it wouldn't work. Tchaikovsky's *Queen of Spades* was performed in Russian the following year, with Janáček's *Jenufa* following in '73, both with Prague opera input and again organised by Albert.

Mentioning *Jenufa* brings to mind another aspect of the man's total involvement and commitment, as well as his understanding of the psychology of performers. The wedding dance performed by the village girls in Act 3 had been causing problems in rehearsal. Summoning the chorus ladies to the Green Room during the second interval on opening night, Maestro Rosen presented them with glasses of brandy, enjoining them to knock it back and to go out and enjoy their dance. Needless to

remark, this had the desired effect, as confirmed by the maestro's beaming smile from the pit.

Albert Rosen's last appearance with DGOS Opera Ireland was in Winter 1992 when he again conducted *Die Fledermaus*. Reviewing the production in the March '93 issue of *Opera*, editor Rodney Milnes wrote: "Chief architect of the success was Albert Rosen. As always, if the conductor is right, nothing serious can go wrong. Rosen has *Fledermaus* in his bones – real (as opposed to fake, which is much more common) Viennese rubato, irresistible, almost Offenbachian élan. The music, and the audience's spirits, danced with him ..."

That last line says it all.

HELPING OUT IN THE GARDEN

Opera Ireland will be giving a helping hand to Britain's Royal Opera while that company is temporarily exiled from its home at Covent Garden. For its season at London's Barbican, the Royal Opera will be using Opera Ireland's surtitle system for its productions of Handel's *Giulio Cesare* and Rameau's *Platée*.

SURTITLES – to look or not to look

Opera Ireland members who do not wish to avail of surtitles during opera performances can arrange to sit in seats at the Gaiety which allow them to ignore the facility. Please indicate whether or not you prefer to have the surtitles in view when booking your seats.

MEMORABLE FIGARO ... GLORIOUS MACBETH

What the critics said about Opera Ireland's Spring productions.

"... most memorable *Figaro* and quite glorious *Macbeth* ... a couple of performances that would have graced any operatic centre, anywhere."

OPERA NOW

FIGARO

"...the entire production (of *Figaro*) by Michael McCaffery was delicious in its constant brilliant humour ... The sets proclaimed magnificence, the sumptuous fantasy costumes in vivid colours with macaroni wigs and all splendidly lit, created a world of artists shot with humanity as Mozart himself did in his opera."

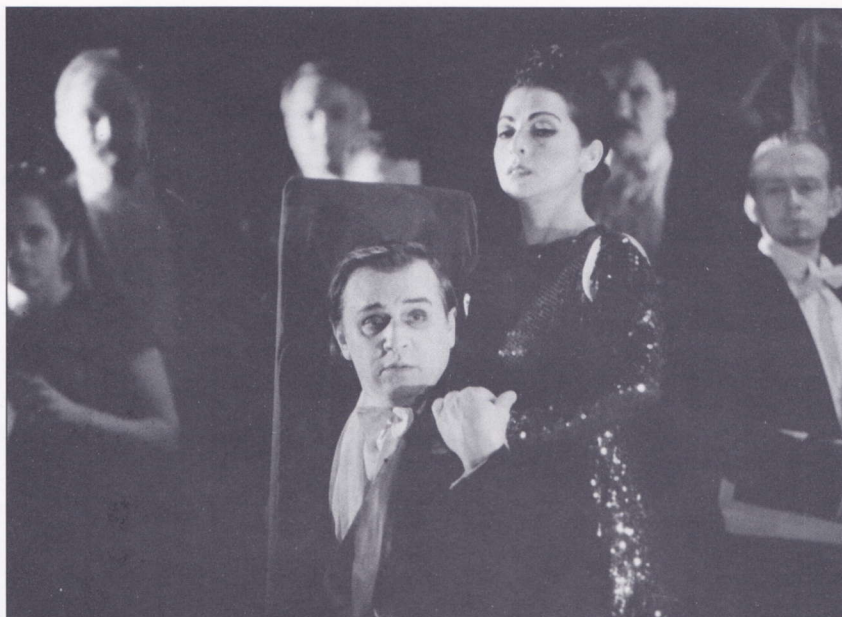
IRISH INDEPENDENT

Michael McCaffery's valedictory production of *Le nozze di Figaro* was as full of insights and keenly-observed characterisation as I have come to expect. A young cast, stiffened by a couple of veterans, sang with style and spirit." *OPERA NOW*

"The undoubted star of the evening was Mary Hegarty, whose pert and alert Susanna was a delight; she delivered some ravishing singing, her "Deh vieni non tardar" being a lesson in Mozartian style. There were excellent interpretations by the rich-toned Swedish mezzo Kristina Hammarström as a highly-believable Cherubino and a confident Deirdre Masterson as Barbarina." *OPERA*



Count Almaviva (Karl Daymond) and Don Basilio (Ugo Benelli) 'comfort' Susanna (Mary Hegarty) in the Act 1 trio from Mozart's *The Marriage of Figaro*.



Lady Macbeth (Karen Notare) crisis-managing her husband (Anatoly Lochak) during the banquet scene in Verdi's *Macbeth*.

"Mariette Kemmer's Countess has depth and authority and she sang with assurance. I particularly liked Desmond Byrne's well-defined Figaro ..."

SUNDAY INDEPENDENT

"Mariette Kemmer was a strong and vocally sound Countess ... the finest performance also came from the distaff side, in Mary Hegarty's lively, resourceful and appealing Susanna." *IRISH TIMES*

MACBETH

"... this must count as one of the most gripping opera evenings of recent seasons in Dublin ... Karen Notare was a gutsy, manipulative Lady Macbeth, not always concerned to be subtle either of voice or character, but often thrilling in *extremis* and at her riveting best in the hot-and-cold crisis management of the banquet scene ..."

IRISH TIMES

"Kaegi reached into the blackened heart of this Shakespearean tragedy ... his direction was detailed and grew out of the text and music. Bruno Schwengl's stark design turned the Gaiety stage into a cauldron of evil ... the strength of the production was the way in which it focused entirely on the drama. Karen Notare gave a compelling, almost faultless, performance as Lady Macbeth ... Her voice was powerful, agile and had a great sense of attack. Her sleep-walking scene, played before a blood red moon which filled the stage, was transfixing" *IRISH NEWS*

"Alexander Anissimov galvanised the RTÉ Concert Orchestra into a performance of *Macbeth* that many an Italian opera house band would have been proud to have played." *OPERA*

"Opera Ireland's (*Macbeth*) was a performance I would happily have sat through again, straight off. I put this down to Dieter Kaegi's subtle direction and Alexander Anissimov's conducting, which tamed the relentless rhythms in favour of a lyrical line that made space for some elegant singing..." *OPERA NOW*

"The richly sung *Macbeth* of Anatoly Lochak was vocally impressive and Stanislav Schwets deployed a magnificent musical bass as Banquo – a pity we lose him so soon."

IRISH INDEPENDENT

OPERA AT HOME

John Allen recommends some recent CD opera sets

Notwithstanding the tales of doom and gloom emanating from the record industry, there has been no stemming of the flow of desirable new and re-issued opera sets appearing on CD. And, to the credit of the issuing companies, the repertory on offer grows ever larger, resulting in some wonderful surprises as well as happy re-discoveries of forgotten treasures from former years. The casting, too, gives us a nice blend of familiar favourites and exciting new talents, and presents lots of scope for the popular game of comparing new voices with those we thought would never be matched, let alone bettered.

VERDI'S FIRST – AND A RARE ONE FROM PACINI

Italian opera is very much to the fore; but most of the familiar central repertoire comes in a huge lot of re-issues – far too much to cope with here – and it is unfamiliar fare, albeit not necessarily by unfamiliar composers, that must take pride of place. A new recording of Verdi's first opera, *Oberto*, (Philips 2CDs 454 472-2), has the veteran Neville Marriner conducting a cast of mainly young singers headed by Maria Guleghina, Sara Fulgoni and the American tenor Stuart Neil, who sang a splendid Rodolfo in Dublin four years ago. Samuel Ramey inclines to wooliness in the title role but not so as to mar a dramatically convincing and extremely well recorded performance of this sometimes underrated opera.

If you like Italian opera from this period, then Marco Polo's recording of Giovanni Pacini's *Saffo* (2CDs 8.2238833/4) is a must. Recorded at Wexford in 1995, it offers two exciting voices, Francesca Pedaci's brightly focused soprano, equally adept at declamation and gentle cantata, and Mariana Pentcheva's rich Verdi-like mezzo, in a duo of roles vocally akin to Bellini's Norma and Adalgisa. The men are less interesting, but the opera is conducted with brio by Maurizio Benini.

OLD FRIENDS IN A NEW LIGHT

Verdi's *La forza del destino* and *Don Carlos* are not exactly unknown territory, but their most



Roberto Alagna: the exciting young French tenor stars in EMI Classics' *Don Carlos* and *La rondine* as well as in Erato's *Tales of Hoffmann*.

recent recordings bear closer investigation. For their new *Forza*, (3CDs 446 951-2) Philips went to St Petersburg and recorded the original version which had its premiere there in 1862. There are many differences between this and Verdi's revised 1869 score. 1862 has no overture or final trio, for instance; but it has an extra tenor aria which is thrillingly delivered by Gegam Grigorian (heard in Ireland in some of Barra Ó Tuama's concerts). Grigorian's estimable spinto is matched by splendid singing from a star-studded cast that includes Galina Gorchakova, Olga Borodina and baritone Nikolai Putilin. Only the bass let's the side down (where have all the Russian basses gone?) but the opera is tautly conducted by Valery Gergiev.

Don Carlos (note the spelling) appears in an original-language performance recorded 'live' at the Paris Châtelet last year (EMI Classics 3CDs CDS5 56152-2) and subtly conducted by Antonio Pappano. Roberto Alagna leads a splendid cast which, a mis-cast Eboli apart, does full justice to Verdi's French grand opéra. Alagna, who is the

answer to every French-tenor-fancier's dream, is abetted by the noble baritone of Thomas Hampson and the silvery soprano of Karita Mattila. José van Dam's Philip II makes up in subtlety what he lacks in weight and he is ably matched by the formidable Inquisitor of Eric Halfvarson.

PUCCINI'S SWALLOW

La rondine may be the poor relation in Puccini's family of romantic operas, but it has fared well on record and nowhere more so than in the terrific new two-CD set from EMI Classics (CDS5 56338-2). Angela Gheorghiu is simply overwhelming as Magda, the 'swallow' of the title. We already know that she is good, very good, but this is something quite special. Supported by Pappano's knowing way with the score, she not only creates a truly believable character, but ravishes the ear constantly. And these qualities extend to her partners: real-life husband Alagna is a vibrant lover and there is a strong second couple in the voices and personalities of Ivana Mula-Tchako and William Matteuzzi.

A COLLECTION OF GALLIC GROTESQUES

Alagna turns up again as the eponymous hero in Erato's *Les contes d'Hoffmann* (3CDs 0630-14330-2). Based on the version prepared by Michael Kaye from recently discovered extra music, this edition of the opera lasts almost three hours, and would have been longer but for the fleet pacing of Kent Nagano. All four villains are sung, as Offenbach intended, by one singer – José van Dam enjoying himself as a series of grotesques; but the three heroines are shared out between Natalie Dessay (a sparkling Olympia), Leontina Vaduva (only fair as Antonia) and Sumi Jo (a soprano Giulietta, as dictated by the revised score).

Debussy's *Pelléas et Mélisande* is a very different work from Offenbach's *Hoffmann*: let's face it, *Pelléas* is a very different work from any other opera ever written. The Naxos set (3 CDs 8.660047-9), recorded live in Lille, is big on presence if short on the hushed atmosphere properly associated with this musical setting of Maeterlinck's arcane drama. But the singing is very good. Mireille Delunsch, one of the bunch of exciting new French voices now emerging, uses her disciplined technique to get across the vulnerability of the fey heroine, while at the same time leaving us in no doubt that here is a singing actress of formidable potential. Gérard Thérue, a baritone *Pelléas* of equal prowess, sounds credibly like a brother of the strong Golaud, Armand Arapian; and the elders are in the assured hands, or rather throats, of the experienced mezzo Hélène Jossoud and the veteran Gabriel Bacquier. Jean-Claude Casadesu conducts with great consideration for his singers mingled with respect for the delicate score.

George Brown! Now there's an unlikely name for an operatic hero. But maybe not when the libretto, however improbable, is Walter Scott inspired and set in Scotland in the eighteenth century. Anyway, who cares when the role is sung with such mellifluous tenor liquidity as it is by Rockwell Blake on the EMI Classics recording of Boieldieu's *La dame blanche* (2CDs CDS5 56355-2). Or when the main female roles are played by two of France's most exciting young sopra-



Majella Cullagh: the Cork soprano sings the title role in the Naxos *Maritana*.

nos: Mireille Delunsch, swapping *Mélisande*'s diffidence for the forthrightness of Jennie Dickson; and Annick Massis, who you may have seen in the television relay of *Le Comte Ory* from Glyndebourne this summer, as Anna, the White Lady of the title.

THE SINGING BIRDS – and a sumptuous *Meistersinger*

The German wing is dominated by three important new recordings. Two of them come from Decca – a superb *Die Meistersinger* from Chicago and an opera that, I must confess, caught me completely by surprise – and a happy surprise at that. Dating from 1920, Walter Braunfels's *Die Vögel* (*The Birds*) (2CDs 448 679-2) is a joyous work, chock-full of sumptuous, seamless melodies that appear to go on forever. The Decca recording is one of its Entartete issues, a series devoted to works that were banned by the Nazi regime during the Third Reich. And when you listen to this music and recall some of the stuff they *didn't* ban, it makes you wonder if they realised what they were losing

in their ethnic-cleansing frenzy. Soprano Hellen Kwon as the Nightingale and tenor Endrik Wottrich as Good Hope lead a cast of young singers, mainly unknown to me apart from the excellent Wolfgang Holzmair, in a performance directed by conductor Lothar Zagrosek, who is something of a specialist in the revival of operas from this period. Wottrich and Holzmair also turn up, as Max and Ottokar, in Nikolaus Harnoncourt's idiosyncratically conducted version of Weber's popular, and oft-recorded, *Der Freischütz* (Teldec 2CDs 4509-97758-2), in which Luba Orgonasova's luscious soprano triumphantly copes with the maestro's funereal pacing of her two big scenes.

Decca went to Chicago to make Georg Solti's second recording of Wagner's *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg* (4 CDs 452 606-2). José van Dam, appearing for the third time in these reviews, dominates proceedings as a thinking-person's Hans Sachs. The voice, never a particularly opulent one, may now

be drier than of yore, but his reading is full of little subtleties and those nuances you are more likely to get in live performances like this. Karita Mattila, as fluent in German romanticism as she is in French grand opéra, is a full-toned Eva who is just a little short of the gushing naiveté the role ideally wants, and she is wooed with mellifluous ardour by the distinguished Canadian tenor Ben Heppner in his second recording of Walter von Stolzing. Alan Opie is a stronger-sung than usual Beckmesser, René Pape an outstanding Pognor, and the long list of lesser characters is strongly cast. The sound of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra is always a delight to hear and Solti, celebrating fifty years as a Decca artist, belies his great age with a performance of considerable authority.

Alben Berg's *Wozzeck* has always fared well on record and Daniel Barenboim's 'live' performance from Berlin (Teldec 2CDs 0630-141082) is no exception. Indeed, with a powerful protagonist from Franz Grundheber and a sumptuous Marie from Waltraud Meier, this whole set is quite overwhelming and is strongly recommended.

BARTOLI BY TWO – AND BY TWO!

The delightful Cecilia Bartoli features in recordings of two eighteenth century masterpieces, Mozart's familiar *Idomeneo* and Haydn's almost-lost *L'anima del filosofo*. In the former (DG 3CDs 447 737) she is utterly convincing as a mellifluous mezzo Idamante, alongside the delicious Ilia of the American soprano Heidi Grant

Murphy and the fiery Elettra of Carol Vaness. Plácido Domingo sings a stylish Idomeneo and the cast is bolstered by the likes of Frank Lopardo, Thomas Hampson and Bryn Terfel in lesser roles. James Levine directs with a lightness that surprised and delighted me. Ms Bartoli sings two roles in the Christopher Hogwood period-instrument recording of Haydn's opera, now usually called by its alternative title *Orfeo et Euridice* on L'Oiseau-Lyre (2CDs 452-668). The versatile mezzo uses all her vocal armoury – from seductive half-voice to ringing coloratura – to play up the difference between the vulnerability of Euridice with the self-confident utterances of the All-knowing Sibyl. Uwe Heilmann's forthright but always agile tenor suits the role of Orfeo admirably.

ENTER THE IRISH

Ann Murray, who has many fine recordings to her credit, is the Irish singer who crops up most often in CD opera sets. As Aminta – another in her portfolio of 'trousers' roles – in Mozart's *Il ré pastore* (Teldec 2CDs 4509-98419) she heads a fine cast that also includes sopranos Eva Mei and Inga Nielsen as well as tenors Roberto Saccà and Markus Schäfer. Again, Harnoncourt is inclined to extreme tempos and Ms Murray has to contend with a particularly dragged-out "L'amerò"; but contend she does, and wins!

Patricia Bardon stars in the title role of Handel's *Orlando* (Erato 3 CDs 0630-14636) under William Christie, who conducts his Les Arts Florissants and a very fine cast with good feeling for the baroque ethos

of the music. Ms Bardon's wide-ranging mezzo easily encompasses the technical and emotional demands of a role originally written for the famous alto-castrato Senestino: her mad scene is outstanding, a virtuoso performance as good as any covered in these pages. She is well partnered by sopranos Rosemary Joshua, Hilary Summers and Rosa Mannion; and Harry van der Kamp is most impressive in the important bass role of Zoroastro.

Two more Irish sopranos impress in Wallace's *Maritana* (Naxos 2CDs 8.554080-1). In spite of heavy cutting (there are four complete numbers missing and numerous internal cuts) and less than full-blooded conducting, there is much to enjoy in this joint RTÉ/Naxos/Marco Polo enterprise. Not in the undernourished Don José of baritone Ian Caddy, perhaps, but certainly in the by turns suave and macho Don Caesar of Paul Charles Clarke, complete with ringing C in "Let me like a soldier fall", and very definitely in the stylish singing of Majella Cullagh in the title role and Lynda Lee as the boy Lazarello. Ms Cullagh's "Scenes that are brightest rightly climaxes proceedings and Ms Lee's "Alas those chimes" is beautifully phrased. The pair's Donizetti-like duet "Sainted Mother" is the probably the best amongst many fine things in the recording. By the way, the budget price Naxos issue is available only in this country: elsewhere the opera is on the full-price Marco Polo label. So you know what to send your overseas relatives and friends for Christmas.

BRUNO'S HOT!

"Who's hot?", a regular feature in the British magazine *Opera Now*, features designer Bruno Schwengl as a 'promising talent' in its current edition. Bruno, who is designing Opera Ireland's *Eugene Onegin* and *Merry Widow*, more properly belongs in the category 'established talent'. The Salzburg-born artist, whose work here already includes *Lucia di Lammermoor*, *Martha*, *Così fan tutte* and *Macbeth* (the last three for Dieter Kaegi productions) is well entrenched as one of the leading theatre designers of his generation. In addition to his work at Wexford and with Dublin's Gate Theatre, he has designed opera, ballet and drama productions for major houses in Britain, mainland Europe and North America. His most recent designs include Offenbach's *Barbe-bleue* in Strasbourg and *Der Rosenkavalier* in Seattle, both with Kaegi, as well as *Coppelia* at the Théâtre du Capitole Toulouse and *Norma* for the Royal Opera in Stockholm.



OPERA QUIZ

Your chance to win a CD set of one of the operas in Opera Ireland's winter season.

Once again we have a few simple questions to test your operatic knowledge. PolyGram Ireland have donated CD sets of *Eugene Onegin* and *The Merry Widow* as prizes. *Onegin* has Dmitri Hvorostovsky in the title role and Nuccia Focile as Tatyana in the acclaimed performance conducted by Semyon Bychkov on Philips Digital Classics; Cheryl Studer stars as the Hanna Glawari in the superb Deutsche Grammophon *Merry Widow* recorded in Vienna and conducted by John Eliot Gardiner.

Bearing in mind the devastating consequences of Tatyana's letter to Eugene Onegin in Tchaikovsky's opera, we thought we'd ask you questions about some other important operatic letters.

1. In Rossini's opera *The Barber of Seville*, who writes a letter to the young man who has been serenading her from the street below her window?
2. In Bizet's *Carmen*, the village girl Michaela brings a letter to Don José from his mother. What other gift has the mother asked her to deliver to José personally?
3. Which character in a Verdi opera writes similarly-worded love-letters to two different married women?
4. In the first act of Beethoven's *Fidelio*, the prison governor Pizarro receives a letter that disturbs him quite a lot. What news is contained in the letter?
5. In which French opera does a married woman take out and read a series of letters



from a former admirer on Christmas Eve?

6. In the second act of Puccini's opera, who reads the contents of a letter to Madame Butterfly?
7. In Mozart's *Marriage of Figaro* there are letters flying all over the place. Which of the characters dictates a very important letter to Susanna in a beautiful Act 3 duet?
8. In the Gilbert and Sullivan opera, the Mikado sends a letter to Ko-Ko regarding the lack of what in the town of Titipu?
9. In which German opera does one of the characters receive a letter inviting him to a rendezvous with someone he

thinks is a young woman, but who is actually a nobleman in drag?

10. In which Puccini opera does the main tenor character read out a letter in which his mother agrees to his marriage with the soprano heroine and looks forward to his bringing home the young woman to meet the family?

Answers should be sent to: **Opera Quiz, Opera Ireland, John Player House, South Circular Road, Dublin 8.**

The closing date for entries is Friday 31 October, 1997. The sender of the first correct entry selected in a draw will have first choice of the two CD sets. The runner-up will get the other set. So, off you go!

WINNERS ALL

Ranka Pollmeier from Co Waterford was the winner of the opera holiday in Vienna, donated by Donnie Potter, in Opera Ireland's Capital Development Fund draw.

Anthony Harpur, from Dalkey, won a DG Originals recording of Mozart's *Le nozze di Figaro* in our Spring Opera Quiz; Paddy Burke, from Churchtown, won the second prize, a DG Originals recording of Verdi's *Macbeth*

And the lucky winner in the Ladies' Committee draw for Luciano Pavarotti's silk handkerchief, autographed by the mega-tenor himself, was Mrs May McSweeney, Killiney, Co Dublin.

IRISH OPERA DIARY

Autumn/Winter 1997/98

052-21689

Information as available at end of August 1997

Opera Northern Ireland

Belfast, Grand Opera House

Booking (081232) 241919

September 19, 23, 25 and 27, 7.30 pm.

AIDA (Verdi)

Jean Glennon, Hyacinth Nicholls,

Mary Nelson, Richard di Renzi,

Jonathan Veira, Richard Robson,

John Hall; c. Martyn Brabbins; p.

Jamie Hayes; d. Nick Barnes.

September 20, 24 and 25, 7.30 pm.

IDOMENEO (Mozart)

Emma Selway, Louise Walsh, Virginia

Kerr, Mark Le Brocq, Christopher

Gillett, John Hall; c. Stephen Barlow;

p. Harry Silverstein; d. Linda Buchanan.

Opera Lecture

Dublin, Mercer Hotel at the

College of Surgeons

September 22 at 8 pm

VIVA MARIA! a celebration of the art of Maria Callas

Barra Ó Tuama Opera Gala

Dublin, National Concert Hall,

September 27, 8 pm.

Cork, City Hall, October 1, 8 pm.

Rosalind Sutherland, Gwyn Hughes

Jones, Marzio Giossi

Lyric Opera

Dublin, National Concert Hall,

October 11, 7.30 pm.

LUCIA DI LAMMERMOOR (Donizetti)

Semi-staged performance to cele-

brate the Donizetti bi-centenary

Nicola Sharkey, Gordon Wilson,

Jeffrey Carl, Julian Faith, Martin

Gilsenen, Anthony Norton; c. Fergus

Sheil; p. Vivian Coates.

Opera Lecture

Dublin, Mercer Hotel at the

College of Surgeons

October 13 at 8 pm

AS THE GOOD BOOK SAYS:

how the Bible fares in opera

Wexford Festival Opera

Wexford, Theatre Royal

Booking (053) 22144; Fax (053) 47438

October 16, 19, 22, 28 & 31, 8 pm.

ELENA DA FELTRE (Mercadante)

Monica Colonna, Cesare Catani,

Luigi Petroni, Nicola Ulivieri,

Stefan Rinaldi-Miliani, Lorenzo

Muzzi; c. Maurizio Benini; p. Sonja

Frisell; d. Marouan Dib.

October 17, 20, 23, 26, 29 &

November 1, 8 pm.

RUSALKA (Dargomizhsky)

Anna Maria Chiuri, Ljuba Chuchrova,

Katia Trebeleva, Enkeleida Shkosa,

Massimiliano Gagliardo, Maxim

Mikhailov; c. Paul Mägi; p. Dimitri

Bertman; d. Igor Nezny (sets)

Tatyana Tulubeva (costumes).

October 18, 21, 24, 27, 30 &

November 2, 8 pm.

LA FIAMMA (Respighi)

Elmira Magomedova, Daniella

Barcellona, Giuseppina Piuanti, Teresa

Matlova, Doreen Curran, Juri

Alexeev, Anatoly Lochak, Carlo

Lepore; c. Enrique Mazzola; p. Franco

Ripo di meana; d. Edoardo Sanchi.

OPERA SCENES

White's Barn, White's Hotel (mornings and afternoons, starting times vary)

October 17, 20, 23, 26, 30 &

November 2

DIE ZAUBERFLÖTE (Mozart)

October 18, 21, 24, 27 & 31

GIANNI SCHICCI (Puccini)

October 19, 22, 25, 29 & November 1

THE RAKE'S PROGRESS (Stravinsky)

Moldavian National Opera

touring **LA TRAVIATA** (Verdi)

and **LA BOHÈME** (Puccini)

Clonmel, Regal Theatre,

October 29 & 30.

Limerick, University Concert hall,

October 31 & November 1

Cork Opera House (Traviata only)

November 2

Dublin, National Concert Hall,

November 3, 8 pm

GRAND OPERA NIGHT (soloists

include soprano Mariana Colpos and

tenor Ionel Voineag).

Opera Theatre Company

Booking (01) 679 4962

Dublin, Samuel Beckett Theatre,

TCD, October 31 and November 1

Drogheda, Droichead Arts Centre,

November 4

Galway, An Taibhdhearc, November 7

Kiltimagh, Town Hall Theatre,

November 9

Longford, backstage Theatre,

November 11

Belfast, Old Museum Arts Centre,

November 14

MY LOVE MY UMBRELLA

(A new opera, based on John

McGahern stories, with setting and

script by James Conway and music

by Derry-born composer Kevin

O'Connell) Fiona McAndrew, Kate

McCarney, Niall Morris, Richard

Jackson; c. Robert Dean; p. Chrissie

Poulter; d. Stephen McManus (sets),

Monica Ennis (costumes). A second

tour of OTC's **The Magic Flute**

(Mozart), in a special version for

children and adults, commences

on November 22. Venues to be

announced.

Opera Lecture

Dublin, Mercer Hotel at the

College of Surgeons

November 10 at 8 pm

THE WIDOW AND THE LETTER-

WRITER: a preview of Lehár's *Merry*

Widow and Tchaikovsky's *Eugene Onegin*

Tosti Anniversary Concert:

Dublin, National Concert Hall,

November 12, 8 pm.

Songs by Tosti (sung by tenor Ugo

Benelli) and excerpts from operas by

Mozart, Rossini, Bellini, Donizetti,

Verdi, Puccini, Cilea, Gounod, Saint-

Saëns, and Bizet sung by Cinzia

Rizzone, soprano; Milena Josipovic,

mezzo; Bo Yong Kim, tenor; Filippo

Betoschi, baritone; accompanist:

Rafaele Di Berto

Barra Ó Tuama Opera Gala

Galway, Leisureland,

November 15, 8 pm

Cork, City Hall, November 19, 8 pm

Dublin, National Concert Hall,

November 22, 8 pm

Barbara Kilduff, Ignacio Encinas,

Julian Konstantinov.

Opera Northern Ireland

Winter tour

LA CENERENTOLA (Rossini)

Cast to be announced; c. Lesley-Ann

Sammons; p. Michael McCarthy.

Dungannon, November 21

Sligo, November 23

Omagh, November 25

Derry, November 26

Newtownards, November 27

Antrim, November 29

Ballymoney, December 2

Ballymena, December 4

Kiltimagh, December 6

Monaghan, December 13

Further venues to be added

between December 6 and 13.

Opera South

Cork Opera House

Booking (021) 270022

November 26, 28, 30 & December 1

LA BOHÈME (Puccini)

Janice Kelly, Fiona O'Reilly, Alan

Oke, Peter Savidge, Nyle Wolfe,

Daniel Borowski; c. Mark Shanahan;

p. Ben Barnes; d. Frank Flood (sets)

Joan O'Clery (costumes)

Opera Ireland

Dublin, Gaiety Theatre

Booking (01) 677 1717

November 27 and 29;

December 1, 3, 5 and 7, 7.30 pm.

THE MERRY WIDOW (Lehár)

Alwyn Mellor, Susanne Elmark, Peter

Grönlund, Anthony Norton, Niall

Morris, Patrick Raftery, Gerard

O'Connor; c. Philippe Jordan; p. Alan

Stanford; d. Bruno Schwengl

Nov 30; Dec 2, 4 and 6, 1997

at 7:30 pm.

EUGENE ONEGIN (Tchaikovsky)

Tatyana Poluektova, Mary Ann

McCormick, Sheila Nadler, Yvonne

Lea, Ivan Choupenitch, Ugo Benelli, John Hancock, Michael Druiett; c. Vadim Munster; p. James Robinson; d. Bruno Schwengl.

Opera Lecture

Dublin, Mercer Hotel at the College of Surgeons
December 8 at 8 pm

OPERA FOR CHRISTMAS: a review of opera CDs suitable for giving, and getting, as Christmas presents

Opera Lecture

Dublin, Mercer Hotel at the College of Surgeons
January 12 at 8 pm

THE DEVIL A DIVO WOULD BE: investigating the claim that the Devil always gets the best tunes in opera

Lyric Opera

Dublin, National Concert Hall,
January 29, 7.30 pm.

LA BOHÈME (Puccini)

Cast to be announced

Opera Theatre Company

Booking (01) 679 4962

Galway, Town Hall Theatre, February 1
Sligo, Hawk's Well Theatre, February 3
Derry, St Columb's Hall, February 5
Dundalk, Town Hall, February 7

Dublin, RDS, February 11 & 12
Athlone (venue to be announced),
February 14

COSÌ FAN TUTTE (Mozart)

Mary Clarke, Thérèse Feighan, Mary Nelson, Donal Byrne, Geoffrey Dolton, Philip O'Reilly. c. Ruxandra Petcu; Production team to be announced.

Opera Lecture

Dublin, Mercer Hotel at the College of Surgeons
February 9 at 8 pm

UNEASY LIES THE HEAD:

the tribulations of operatic royals

Opera Northern Ireland

Belfast, Grand Opera House
Booking (081232) 241919

February 28 to March 7

HÄNSEL & GRETEL (Humperdink)

Cast to be announced; c. Graham Jackson; p. Aidan Long.

Opera Lecture

Dublin, Mercer Hotel at the College of Surgeons
March 9 at 8 pm

THE RISE AND FALL OF OPÉRA-

BOUFFE: French opérette in the 19th and early 20th centuries

Opera Lecture

Dublin, Mercer Hotel at the College of Surgeons April 13 at 8 pm

THE FAT MAN AND THE FANTASIST:

a preview of Verdi's *Falstaff* and Offenbach's *Tales of Hoffmann*

Opera Ireland

Dublin, Gaiety Theatre

Booking (01) 677 1717

April 18, 20, 22, 24 and 26, 1998 at 7:30 pm.

THE TALES OF HOFFMANN

(Offenbach)

Ana Camelia Stefanescu, Regina

Nathan, Mary Anne McCormick,

Jean-Pierre Furlan, Andre Gregorie,

James Nelson, Laurence Albert;

c. Claude Schnitzler; p. Joel Lauwers;

d. Louis Desire

April 19, 21, 23 and 25, 1998 at 7:30 pm.

FALSTAFF (Verdi)

Anne Margarethe Dahl, Hanna

Schaer, Helmut Berger-Tuna; c.

Antonello Allemandi; p. Dieter

Kaegi; d. Stefanie Pasterkamp

NEW VENUE FOR OPERA LECTURES

Callas tribute opens series

The new Mercer Hotel at the College of Surgeons, just around the corner from the Gaiety Theatre, is the venue for John Allen's illustrated opera lectures this season. The series opens on Monday 22 September with "Viva Maria!", a celebration of the art of the great Maria Callas on the twentieth anniversary of her death. All of the lectures will take place on Monday evenings at 8 pm in the Mercer Hotel at the College of Surgeons, which is located on the corner of Mercer Street and York Street: the full programme is as follows:

September 22 **VIVA MARIA!:**

a celebration of the art of Maria Callas

October 13

AS THE GOOD BOOK SAYS:

how the Bible fares in opera

November 10

THE WIDOW AND THE LETTER-WRITER:

a preview of Lehár's *Merry Widow* and Tchaikovsky's *Eugene Onegin*

December 8

OPERA FOR CHRISTMAS:

a review of opera

January 12

CDs suitable for giving, and getting, as Christmas presents

THE DEVIL A DIVO WOULD BE:

investigating the claim that the Devil always gets the best tunes in opera

February 9

UNEASY LIES

THE HEAD: the tribulations of operatic royals

March 9

THE RISE AND FALL OF OPÉRA-BOUFFE:

French opérette in



Maria Callas, who died in Paris on 16 September 1977.

the 19th and early 20th centuries

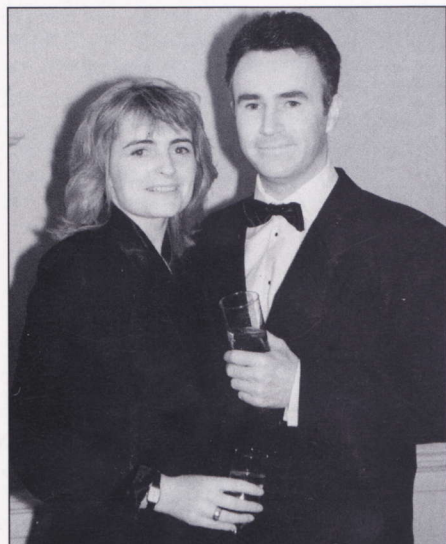
April 13

THE FAT MAN AND THE FANTASIST:

a preview of Verdi's *Falstaff* and Offenbach's *Tales of Hoffmann*

INTERVAL TALK

Members and sponsors enjoying their night at the opera last April



(Clockwise from top left)
Gerry O'Kelly, Aileen Walsh, Donnie Potter and Carmel Mallaghan.
Joan and Shane Cleary.
Michael and Mary Whelan.
Margaret McDonnell and Dermot O'Kelly.
Anne Keogh, Ronan O'Caoimh and Roisín O'Boyle.
Vanessa and Edward Simmons.

